
Congestive Heart Failure

A Service of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System

Patient Education Series 2005

What Is Congestive Heart Failure?

Heart failure means that the heart cannot pump enough blood because of heart muscle damage or valve disease.

How Can I Tell If I Have It?

- ◆ You will be short of breath, especially with activity or when lying flat in bed.
- ◆ You will get tired easily.
- ◆ Your legs and ankles swell.
- ◆ You will gain weight without trying.

What Causes It?

- ◆ High blood pressure.
- ◆ Heart attack.
- ◆ Coronary artery disease or heart valve disease.
- ◆ Lung disease.
- ◆ Being born with heart disease.
- ◆ Anemia.

How to take care of Heart Failure

- ◆ Heart Failure is serious, but if you follow these instructions, it is treatable. If you do not, the complications make the disease worse and harder to treat.
- ◆ Take all of your medications as directed by your healthcare provider. **DO NOT SKIP** taking your medicines.
- ◆ Weigh yourself daily. Write it down. If you gain more than 3 pounds you should contact the TeleCare nurse at (877) 252-4866.
- ◆ Follow a low salt (2-gram sodium) diet. Avoid canned foods, and read food labels for the amount of sodium.
- ◆ Don't smoke.
- ◆ Wear or carry identification that tells your medical problem and what medicine you take.

Will I Need to Take Medicine?

- ◆ There are medicines to drain fluids from the body and help with swelling. Follow the doctor's orders on all medicine.
- ◆ **NEVER, NEVER, NEVER** run out of your heart failure medications. Order refills at least two weeks in advance.

Exercise:

- ◆ When your symptoms are stable, start with a six-minute walk three times a day.
- ◆ Increase each week as tolerated.
- ◆ Exercise indoors when it is hot or cold outdoors.

Appointments:

- ◆ Keep your appointments.
- ◆ If you must miss your appointment, please call to cancel and re-schedule.

What if My Symptoms get Worse?

- ◆ **CALL 911** if you have:
 - ◆ Chest pain.
 - ◆ Symptoms of a stroke.
 - ◆ Severe shortness of breath.
 - ◆ Irregular heartbeat that does not improve quickly.
- ◆ Call TeleCare if you have:
 - ◆ Ankle swelling worse than usual.
 - ◆ Difficulty breathing during regular activities or exercise.
 - ◆ Shortness of breath when you lie down.
 - ◆ If you gain more than 3 pounds in 2-3 days.

COMMENTS:

Patient's Name